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## Article

# Crafting Sustainability: Handcraft in Contemporary Art and Cultural Sustainability in the Finnish Lapland

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**Abstract:** Crafting sustainability is discussed here with respect to the dimensions of handcraft traditions in contemporary art for promoting cultural sustainability in the Scandinavian North. Aspects of decolonization, cultural revitalisation, and intergenerational dialogue form an integral part of the negotiations around the need for cultural survival and renewal for a more sustainable future. These dimensions should also be considered in the development of the current education of art teachers. Learning traditional skills and applying them in contemporary art constitute an influential method when striving for cultural sustainability. This study examines three handcraft-based contemporary art cases through art-based action research conducted in the Finnish and the Swedish Lapland. The results show that handcraft-based contemporary art practices with place-specific intergenerational and intercultural approaches create an open space for dialogue where the values and the perceptions on cultural heritage can be negotiated.

**Keywords:** sustainable culture; cultural sustainability; art education for sustainability; informal education

## 1. Handcraft and Art as Catalysts for Cultural Sustainability

In the University of Lapland, long-term action research has been conducted to support the sustainable development of the Arctic through place-specific artistic activities in remote regions [1–3]. This is in line with the rising interest in rewriting the forgotten cultural history of the Finnish Lapland [4,5] and with the growing interest in using the arts as a representation of the North [6,7]. Finding solutions to both regional and cultural challenges requires sensitive approaches, expertise in various disciplines, collaborative research, communality, and international cooperation. The questions are tightly connected to cultural identities, which in turn, are often constructed through art. Art is invariably the renewing and the strengthening element of cultures [1].

This article discusses how recreating old handcraft traditions with contemporary art methods both revitalizes and reconstructs culture. While following the traditions of artistic research and action research, the authors aim to promote the use of handcraft while researching it. Cultural sustainability is examined through cultural continuation, reconstruction, and locality in the context of the Finnish Lapland. These aspects of cultural sustainability are linked to strengthening cultural identity [8], cultural revitalisation [9], and decolonization [10] of small northern communities through place-specific approaches [1,11]. As art educators, the authors also discuss cultural sustainability through educational aspects, and the research setting is in informal education that takes place in rural villages and small communities in northern Finland and elsewhere in the Arctic. The authors argue that learning traditional skills and applying them in contemporary art comprise an influential method when striving for cultural sustainability. Dessein et al. [12] discuss eco-culture that is related to social learning

by working with place-conscious and place-responsive teaching, sharing, and learning that aim for a sustainable way of living for the future. Sustainability lies in community-based thinking where culture represents both problem and possibility, form and process [12]. At the end of this article, the authors review how the education of art teachers should be developed to meet the principles of cultural sustainability in a better way.

Traditional local knowledge and skills with long historic roots ought to be recognised as a valuable form of cultural heritage for contemporary culture. Cultural renewal and reconstruction should also be supported according to the guidelines of culturally sustainable development. Auclair and Fairclough [13] determine cultural heritage—one of the key elements of cultural sustainability—as a continual process of remaking that is rooted in social construction. They emphasise its vitality, in contrast to the interpretations of heritage as being of static nature for which the only purpose is to protect the past [13]. When issues of renewing or protecting cultural heritage are discussed, the inevitable question of power and ownership arises: Who determines what heritage should be protected and what should be renewed? The Faro Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage [14] encourages local communities to assume the key role in determining their heritage values. This approach is believed to increase the local actors' commitment to work for a culturally sustainable future.

Friedman [8] discusses different levels of cultural identity, where cultural heritage is one of its main building blocks. Traditional crafting skills and purposes for handcrafting find new meanings along the generational chains. The authors of this article perceive heritage as an intergenerational process [15], where history and traditions are passed on from one generation to another and reshaped in contemporary and spatial contexts of society. Shubert and Joubert [15] discuss intergenerational relationships from the perspective of intercultural dialogue. Cultural perceptions and interpretations differ between generations and cause tensions when they collide. Hence, the skills in maintaining constructive and reconstructive dialogue between generations require intercultural competence. Shubert and Joubert also point out that the youth in indigenous communities tend to view the cultural survival of traditions, customs, and identities as more valuable than the youth in the Western world [15]. In this article, crafting sustainability refers to a combination of dialogues among different cultures; in addition to intergenerational dialogue, the dialogue between indigenous and non-indigenous art is also a meaningful part of the concept. The dialogue is formed through handcraft as a shared cultural heritage between indigenous and non-indigenous people. This shared dialogic heritage is in line with the term “northern knowledge system” [16] derived from the indigenous knowledge system that consists of shared traditions, a historic understanding of nature, and the use of natural materials.

Currently, indigenous artists have also assumed a significant role in Western institutional art. They have utilised methods of photography art, video art, and other contemporary art forms to analyse their own heritage, culture, traditions, and world views [17,18], and to apply their multi-ethnic background and environmental knowledge as a basis for their art [19]. Many indigenous contemporary artists have become well-known in combining traditional crafts with conceptual and visual artwork [18,20,21]. In this sense, they have pointed the way to integrate traditional cultural heritage into expressions of contemporary art, at least in Lapland. Non-indigenous artists, who also take part in the northern knowledge system, could follow a similar paradigm to reconnect with their heritage. Attention could be paid to intercultural dialogue on indigenous and non-indigenous traditions as a strength and a vital element leading to mutual learning.

When the discussion focuses on cultural sustainability in the context of the Scandinavian North and its resident communities, the concepts of decolonisation and cultural revitalisation need to be examined more closely. Communities in the Arctic face climate change and exploitation of natural resources, which have cumulative impacts on culture [22]. Moreover, the youth living in villages in the Arctic, similar to all peripheral places, commonly have to leave to continue their education in larger cities [23]. This situation leads to distortion of social structures and cultural disintegration of small towns and villages. Disintegration of cultural activities and psycho-social problems can be

regarded as related to the loss of cultural identity [24]. For years, the Sami indigenous communities living in Finland have been suppressed by the state and have suffered from the denial of their cultural rights. For example, while many languages are under the threat of disappearance, culture-based artistic practices are also fragile and at risk due to diminishing numbers of indigenous peoples who possess the traditional skills, local knowledge, and deep cultural memory to sustain the transmission of traditions [25]. According to the United Nations report in 2009, the situation of indigenous peoples worldwide continues to be critical; they still face discrimination and suffer from colonial structures in society [26]. Decolonisation means learning to recognise dominant assumptions and ideologies that suppress and exploit minority people's rights and living areas. Decolonisation includes the aspect of recovering and renewing traditional, non-commodified cultural patterns, such as mentoring and intergenerational relationships [10,27]. Revitalisation has become an equal partner of decolonisation and is a process that aims to restore the values of old traditions but in a context that is not in itself traditional but contemporary [16,28]. When discussing traditional knowledge and handcraft, it is important to recognise that indigenous people's knowledge and cultural expressions should not be marketed and patented without their consent or participation [26].

Participatory and community art practices are applied to respond to these challenges in the Scandinavian North. Community art takes place in an informal educational context. This method is used when aiming to create dialogue between artists/teachers and participating communities or other groups of people. As art education professor Mirja Hiltunen states, community art and community-based art education are used to create an open space for dialogue [2,29]. Community art has similar principles to those of place-based education [30,31], community-based art education [29], intercultural art education [32], and art education for sustainable development [33,34]. Increased social interaction and support for the sense of communality are often viewed as principal elements in the education for sustainable development [33–35]. Participatory pedagogy and participatory art teach collaboration skills that are essential when encountering the challenges of sustainable development [31,33]. The special feature of doing art together is the simultaneous construction of communality through collaborative activities and symbols of the joint artwork [29].

Despite some research on art education for sustainable development, the potential of community art and art education in general, cultural sustainability has not yet been studied and discussed in the context broadly enough. Jokela [36,37] has argued about the general need for reconsideration of the way that art and design are taught in higher education. The requirements for culturally sustainable development as described above demand a re-examination of art teacher training as well. The northern sociocultural setting, culture-sensitive art education [38], and the northern knowledge system [16,39] challenge the Western way of teaching art and design.

Today, context-sensitive art and design education have moved away from the opinion that art and design education convey the same cultural values worldwide and that the ways to implement education are the same everywhere. The Faculty of Art and Design at the University of Lapland—the northernmost complete art and design institution in the world—has combined contemporary art, project-based learning, community-based art education, and service design thinking to promote art education in order to create artistic activities that generate social innovation and enterprise to support wellbeing in the North [3,30,31,36].

## 2. Art-Based Action Research as a Strategy

In their research on crafting sustainability, the authors have studied the use of traditional handcrafting skills and methods, materials, and tools. Over the past couple of years the topic has been closely examined in the international collaboration project called Handmade in Arctic Norden (2017–2018) funded by the Nordic Culture Fund. The project's thematic emphasis has been on handcrafting. During the execution of the project, exhibitions and a catalogue were produced to present, study and evaluate the variety of handcraft-based methods and materials used in Arctic art

and design and Sami duodji (traditional Sami handcraft method) [40]. The main focus has been on promoting innovative research on contemporary art and art education.

The methodological choice for this study is art-based action research (ABAR). More a research strategy than a complete method, ABAR has been developed at the University of Lapland to combine artistic practices with the development of informal education, community empowerment and regional support [1]. ABAR aims to develop the professional methods and working approaches of the artist–teacher–researcher and the artist–researcher. The strategy shares some common features with international arts-based research [41,42], artistic research [43] and action research. ABAR also has parallels with a/r/tography; in both, practical and theoretical research are conducted simultaneously, and research topics are situated in the middle ground of teaching, art, and communities. While phenomenology, feminist theory and theories of contemporary art have contributed to a/r/tography [44], ABAR is rooted in environmental and community art, project-based action and community-based art education. These are process-oriented dialogical and place-specific artforms.

Contemporary art and artistic research usually aim to highlight various matters and stimulate discussion. Commonly, artistic research is conducted on these issues and presented in the artworks. The objective of ABAR is fundamentally different; it aims to identify and distinguish problems at the local level and create solutions through artistic work. For example, objectives address community empowerment, social change, and an increase in environmental responsibility and the sense of community [1,45]. Among others, ABAR has been influenced by social pedagogy, particularly socio-cultural inspiration and critical pedagogy [46]. The approach takes into account the creation of spaces for encounters, the environment, the community's history and the performative nature of art [1]. The use of traditional skills and crafts has been implemented as one of the methods.

ABAR is structured by the cyclical progress of research—planning, practical action, reflection, evaluation and theorising. Various research methods can be implemented to supplement the analytical process of the research conducted through ABAR. In contrast to much of the other artistic research, the focus is not on the development of one's personal artistic expression but on the interaction among co-artists, co-researchers, and participants. The result of this sharing and empowering process can also be called 'the art of art education' [3,45].

The authors of this article live and have their family roots in small communities in the Finnish and the Swedish Lapland. Their research positions are non-indigenous, but due to their family roots or present living arrangements, their backgrounds are in communities that have lived side-by-side in intercultural situations where lifestyles and traditions have blended throughout history. Hence, they hold both insider and outsider positions regarding their research topic, and in cultural situations, they consider themselves researchers in-between [47]. They have learnt traditional crafts from their parents and have used these skills in their artworks. They have been conducting long-term ABAR on the use of traditional handcraft methods and materials in contemporary art, community art and empowerment of the Arctic communities. Most of the artistic work has been dialogical and community oriented but has also included individual artistic expressions. The study data comprises the artistic works described in the following sections and the documented interaction with the participants, their reflections, and verbalisation of their experiences during the artistic activity.

### 3. Results: Three Cases of Handcraft-Based Contemporary Art in a Dialogue with Local Communities

With regard to the first case in the study, the so-called "himmeli" is a traditional Finnish decorative mobile. It is made from short strips of rye straw tied together with string form a complex and symmetrical three-dimensional structure. It is used as a Christmas decoration that is hung over dining tables in many Finnish homes. What is less known is that the himmeli is thought to originate from a canopy decoration used in Medieval and Renaissance festivities in Central Europe. The word 'himmeli' has its roots in the Swedish and the German languages; himmel means sky and heaven. Maria Huhmarniemi began creating himmeli sculptures by extending traditional decorations (Figure 1).



She learnt to make traditional straw decorations from her mother and morphed these symmetric forms into free and wild sculptures by using coloured plastic drinking straws, as well as the traditional natural straws. She has created several series of himmeli sculptures that bear a political message; the himmeli sculptures have Swedish and German names underlying the fact that art develops in interaction with other cultures. She has also organised workshops and tutored participants to build himmelis together. Some of the workshops have been cross-generational, with young, middle-aged, and elderly participants; others have been intercultural, attended by participants from diverse cultural backgrounds (Figures 2 and 3).



**Figure 1.** Maria Huhmarniemi, Himmeli I, 2011 (figure: Maria Huhmarniemi).



**Figure 2.** Workshops on himmeli building (figure: Andreas Fernandez).



**Figure 3.** Workshops on himmeli building (figure: Maria Huhmarniemi).

The second case study pertains to the traditional ways of using natural materials and turning them into contemporary art. For some years, Elina Härkönen has worked with several mixed village communities and intercultural groups in northern Finland. In the community-based art working they have used different natural materials varying from traditional haymaking (Figure 4) and willow sculpting to wool-dyeing processes with wild plants. Härkönen is interested in art as a community and participatory practice due to its dialogic nature and the involved intercultural encounters while working with traditional handcraft methods. When people come together and work with their hands, conversations flow more freely, and place-related matters and memories rise to the surface. The old communities hold a great deal of tacit knowledge about natural materials that often emerges in intercultural and intergenerational collaboration. The old Sami and other northern communities have utilized nature plants for different everyday purposes throughout the history but the older generations' ability to 'read' the nature is threatening to disappear [48]. Knowledge is no longer passed to younger generations due to the changed urbanized living habits.

One example of a tradition that is no longer part of everyday life is the use of wetland sedges as shoe grass to insulate the traditional Sami fur shoes. Although traditionally from Sami origin, the shoe grasses have been utilized also within other communities living in the Arctic region dating back in the 20th century. Due to its versatile qualities, it has been a necessity both in winter and in summer. Instead of wearing socks, the dry grass is tucked inside the shoes to keep feet warm and dry. For storage purposes, the cut and softened hay is spun and twisted into a ball, known as a 'fiera' [49] (Figure 5).



**Figure 4.** Haymaking tradition used as community art (figure: Liu Huang).



**Figure 5.** The locals teaching international students about their haymaking traditions (fiera and figure: Tanya Kravtsov).

Use of natural dyes is a universal tradition and has long roots in Finland as well. A special feature in the Finnish tradition is to collect plants from nature and use them fresh, in contrast to the general European system of using dried materials for dyeing [50]. The collection of wild plants from nature follows the special Finnish legal concept of ‘every man’s right’ that allows anyone to pick wild berries, mushrooms, and flowers, as long as they are not protected species [51]. Currently, dyeing with natural materials is a skill that mainly enthusiasts maintain. In the autumn of 2017, Härkönen organized a dyeing workshop for local women in Lapland (Figures 6 and 7). The women were of different generations and had various relationships with handcrafts. The workshop aimed for participants to experiment with different dyes and become familiar with the traditional natural dyeing methods. Each dyed material resulted in a form of artwork, but its form was not decided before seeing the results. In the workshop, Härkönen was interested in the conversations that arose when working by hand. One of the women was a craft artisan by profession and experienced in natural dyes. The other women brought their knowledge of plants and wool, and their skills were shared throughout the process. The spectrum of colours equally surprised everyone; none of the women had expected such variety (Figure 8). Subsequently, Härkönen continued her analysis by working on the yarn to create an artwork that was exhibited in 2018 (Figure 9).



**Figure 6.** Women working through the dyeing process (figure: Marja Ylioinas).



**Figure 7.** Women working through the dyeing process (figure: Salla-Mari Koistinen).



**Figure 8.** The spectrum of colours created through different dyes (figure: Marja Ylioinas).





**Figure 9.** The final artwork exhibited at the University of Lapland in 2018 (figure: Hossein Tabandehpour).

Concerning the third case study, Timo Jokela grew up in a small village in Lapland. When he was young, he helped his father to build traditional wooden boats and learnt a variety of traditional skills that were vanishing from their community. He has used several traditional ways of crafting and has noticed that new meanings become associated with traditional materials and tools. Hence, he started to combine traditional, non-artistic working methods with contemporary art in installations and public art. One of his works is a memorial to an old church that is claimed to have been built in the early 1600s, in a low forest called Kirkkokuusikko (Spruces Church) in the hinterland of Kittilä, northern Finland. His grandfather used to call the forest by that name. The story of the church in the forest was thought to be all true by the village people over several generations, but the exact location of the church was unknown. Jokela designed the memorial and searched the literary and archival sources for evidence of the veracity of the Spruces Church story. He built the replica first in his studio and then dismantled it, transported its parts to the site, and re-erected it there. The site is located in the middle of a swamp, several kilometers from the nearest road. The transport alone required the assistance of local reindeer herders. The transport, assembly, and celebration (Figure 10) of the work was a performative and communal event. The Jokela Family Association, which commissioned the work, hoped that the memorial would generate debate about what and who would be remembered or forgotten, what would be worth reminiscing about, and who could recall the history of Lapland [52].



**Figure 10.** The process of building the replica and celebrating the Spruces Church (figure: Timo Jokela).

In each of the three cases, the practice has taken place at the intersection of art, design, and handcraft. For example, the *himmeli* is most commonly perceived as a type of design and handcraft, not as a form of art. In none of these cases did the original work initially form part of the art world—their exhibition in galleries occurred in a secondary manner. In Western countries' art, design, and craft are detached from each other and viewed separately [37]. They are seen as having their own media of expression, language, and tradition. Art is displayed in art museums, galleries, art institutions, and cultural events and is led by artists or curators. Design is most often connected with industrial organisations, businesses, and socioeconomic activities. Crafts are perceived mostly as the result of individual craftsmanship with small-scale vocational opportunities or in larger contexts as part of recreational activities. Each field has its own experts. Art in Western culture is mostly about individual creativity and encouraging alternative and critical ways of viewing the world. Design is about problem-solving based on people's needs, and experts of crafts are the so-called bearers of tradition. Ethnicity is discussed and constructed mainly in relation to handcrafts [53]. Only over the last decades has there been a tendency to overlap the boundaries of art, design, and crafts; some contemporary art exhibitions and publications have been produced to study the intersections of art and design and art and crafts [54,55].

Writings on relational art and dialogical artistic practice have highlighted art as a process of making connections among people [56]. In contrast to the universal aspects typically stressed in modernism, the emphasis is on the situational aspects of art and its links to people's everyday activities, such as handcrafting [57–59]. The use of traditional handcraft methods in community art has the potential for enhanced dialogue, especially intercultural and intergenerational dialogue as it is also discussed by indigenous researchers [25]. From this perspective, the intergenerational dialogue means the way of using handcraft-based methods as a framework and context for conversations among young, middle-aged and elderly people, as well as between artists and community members. Each of the cases in this study has promoted intergenerational dialogue. The ability to use similar tools, methods, and materials as one's parents and grandparents did means a connection to one's roots. One of the core questions is whether community art projects and artworks can also transmit some of the skills, attitudes, and values to the next generation. The tendency noticed during the craft-based art workshops in small northern communities is the way that people respond to participation. Naturally, people find participating easier when the method of working is familiar. Due to intergenerational experience, handcraft seems a more natural approach to the majority of people than the more conventional artistic methods. Although community art settings are usually of a low threshold with no skill requirements, people tend to hesitate in participating.

In addition to intergenerational dialogue, the process of handcrafting can be applied to support intercultural dialogue. People worldwide, especially from rural regions, have experienced handcrafting or observed their family members doing so. These shared experiences are valuable when searching for connections among people from diverse cultural backgrounds. Joint art-based craft making can be applied to a two-way integration of immigrants into northern cultures. The locals can learn from the immigrants and vice versa, and the interaction can cause a connection among people, similar to what occurred in the *himmeli* workshops.

According to the indigenous scholars and other researchers of Sámi art, indigenous cultures in the North and the Arctic regions offer a holistic way of thinking about the role of art, design, and craft as part of culture and eco-social life [21,25,60]. The traditions of art, design, and craft should be considered as a whole. Differences in sociocultural contexts among them have not been apparent, especially when thinking about the nomadic lifestyles. As art historian Tuija Wahlroos [61] explains, "Artefacts, from arrowheads to basketry and reindeer lassos, entailed so much that was personal—one's own skill, vision and invested time—that they became more than objects. They became the valued symbols of their maker family". This kind of holistic understanding of art, design, and handcraft has served as an inspiration for the cases in this study. A similar unity of art, design and handcraft can be found in the indigenous cultures.

Research professor of arctic indigenous politics Rauna Kuokkanen has discussed the need for establishing the significance and objectives of an 'indigenous paradigm'. This has two dimensions: to re-centre indigenous values and cultural practices, and to place indigenous peoples and their issues into mainstream discourses from marginal positions [39]. Kuokkanen explains that indigenous peoples' own concerns and worldviews should be in the centre when decolonising indigenous minds. The paradigm includes criticism towards the Western dualistic metaphysics and the Eurocentric way of thinking [39]. The indigenous paradigm challenges people's everyday thinking and actions guided by dualism in Western 'high culture' and non-Western 'folkloric' traditions [39]. Handcrafted contemporary art in Lapland can be perceived as part of the indigenous paradigm and the decolonising process. In this regard, the authors refer not only to decolonising indigenous cultures but in a broader sense, to decolonising the North. Several scholars of northern cultures have stressed the need for decolonisation among other multi-ethnic communities, for example, Lähtenmäki [62] in mixed Sámi–Finnish societies in Central Lapland, Finland, and Corbett [23] in the coastal fishery communities in Nova Scotia, Canada. The basis for the concept of northern knowledge lies in their writings.

As part of interculturalism, the dialogue between indigenous art and culture and non-indigenous art and culture in the Arctic is one of the key factors for the sustainable future of Arctic art and culture. This theme has dimensions in cultural sustainability and issues connected to the ownership of culture, revitalisation of traditions, and the intercultural and multicultural nature of the communities in Lapland. The blending of Sámi culture with other lifestyles and vice versa is rather common in Lapland [63,64]. This intercultural and multicultural composition causes sociocultural challenges. Indigenous people struggle with the issues connected to the ownership of their culture and with the definitions of their own people; the non-indigenous people in the Arctic typically face the loss of their cultural identity. Non-indigenous people have often lived in the same regions for generations and practiced similar livelihoods compared with the indigenous communities.

Currently, determining the non-indigenous people's culture has become problematic with the increased awareness of indigenous people's rights. Some non-indigenous people have difficulties in recognizing their traditions and taking pride in their heritage that is blended with indigenous heritage, while facing the criticism of being the colonialists. The authors of this article view the new divisions between the northern indigenous and the non-indigenous communities related to the traditional ways of life as seemingly unnecessary and may in the worst scenario lead to some traditions dying when less people have the skills to keep them alive.

Revitalisation never means a return to history, culture, and identity that is pure, authentic, and untouched. Revitalisation is always about an interpretation of a culture, and this interpretation changes from person to person [9]. Even today's contemporary art may eventually become a tradition and be traditionalized as well; the traditional and the modern are constantly reinvented [21].

In contemporary art, the use of handcraft methods seems to focus on the traditional skills of women—knitting, sewing, and crocheting. Currently, both male and female artists can employ these methods [55]. The methods of Jokela's artistic work include wood carpeting that is traditionally regarded as belonging to the world of men. It has the potential impact for empowerment in northern villages where it is common for men to be at risk of alienation from society.

The ABAR strategy utilized in this study has been developed by keeping northern knowledge in focus. Sensitive and community-driven approaches in all the introduced cases have been the starting points of action. The intention has been to carefully follow the principles of cultural sustainability and throughout the process, negotiate the participating community's needs and aims. The cases have reached different amounts of people; the communities have varied from regional to more symbolic connections among the participants. The fundamental aim of ABAR lies in its developmental nature; these cases have served as starting points for the continuation of similar actions subsequently applied to other contexts. Handcrafted contemporary art approaches offer countless possibilities, ranging from technological experimentations to creating spaces for dialogue among different cultural groups.

As Aamold argues, a mix of indigenous and critical methodologies is required in the research on contemporary art in the North [19].

These paradigm changes have led to the re-evaluation of how art is taught in schools and universities, and highlighted the aims of a culturally sensitive approach in art education [38] and the UNESCO objectives for ecologically, socially, culturally, and economically sustainable development. These objectives incorporate current issues, such as the survival of regional cultures, combined with the inhabitants' self-determination of their own culture, while securing social and economic stability for all communities. In the North-related art education, the question is not only about safeguarding the cultural heritage but rethinking about the nature of the school education policy and curriculum. Bringing the operating modes of socially active contemporary art into northern contexts and merging them with the aims of culturally sensitive education and the questions of decolonization require a pedagogic renewal of art teacher training [36,37].

#### 4. Conclusions

In this article, the authors have shown the perspectives of northern handcraft traditions in contemporary art and discussed their role in promoting cultural sustainability in the North. The issues of protecting and renewing cultural heritage are multilayered and often involve politicised questions of ownership and power. The authors propose the use of handcraft in community and contemporary art as a method for a broader participation of community members in artistic practice and as a tool for the decolonising process of the North. The authors refer to decolonisation and the revitalisation of cultural practices in which indigenous and non-indigenous cultures have been blended. The use of handcraft in community and contemporary art can support intergenerational and intercultural dialogue due to its intercultural nature. The basic handcraft traditions are to some extent familiar almost everywhere and hence create low-threshold activities among groups from different cultural backgrounds. The handcraft-based contemporary art practices with place-specific intergenerational and intercultural approaches create an open space for dialogue where the values and the perceptions of cultural heritage can be negotiated. Cultural sustainability as a concept is place-specific. Each location needs to evaluate its own needs, rights, and responsibilities for more sustainable living; if provided from outside, it no longer serves the purposes of cultural sustainability.

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